

Editorial

Association for Medical Education in the Western Pacific Region: Presidential Address 2016

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As the current President of AMEWPR, I'm pleased to provide an outline of the organisation's recent activities, and a projection of our plans for the coming period. In doing so, I must first acknowledge the considerable achievements of my predecessor as President, Prof Duck-sun Ahn of South Korea. His period of presidency, covering the four years

from July 2010 to June 2014, was one of great expansion in the activities of the Association, raising our profile as advocates for the highest level of quality assurance in medical education in our region.

Background

By way of background, the AMEWPR is one of the six regional associations affiliated with the World Federation for Medical Education, with responsibility for enhancing the quality of medical education in the Western Pacific region of WHO (<http://amewpr.org.au>). This vast region has the highest population of all the WFME divisions, and extends from Mongolia in the north to Australia and New Zealand in the south.

Consistent with the mission of the WFME (<http://wfme.org>), our Association achieves its goals by focusing on the quality,

management, organisation, support and delivery of medical education, rather than on the details of how medicine is taught. It does this largely through the application of WFME's Global Standards for basic medical education in the conduct of external evaluations of medical school programs, and through the promotion of national programs of accreditation. At the same time, the Association provides a forum for exchange of information and resources amongst members, and maintains links with key organisations such as the World Health Organisation through its Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO)(<http://wpro.who.int>).

Recent activities and current programs

The Association's activities over the past 18 months can be divided broadly into two: medical school evaluations and consultations on the one hand, and various special projects on the other.

Perhaps the most valued role of AMEWPR has been in arranging and delivering external evaluations of individual medical school programs for the purposes of quality improvement. These processes entail an assessment of the medical school's programme against WFME global standards, conducted by an evaluation team convened by AMEWPR at the request of particular schools. A standard memorandum of understanding has been developed by the Association to describe the process and conditions governing these evaluations, including the costs involved.

The broad protocol for these assessments was developed largely during the presidency of my predecessor, and was applied previously to evaluations of the Health Sciences University of Mongolia in 2011, and to the Tokyo Women's Medical University in 2012. More recently, in December 2015, an AMEWPR team contributed to an external evaluation of the medical programme of the Korea University College of Medicine.

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This process was unique in that it involved a joint process of assessment by AMEWPR as well as the national accreditation authority of South Korea, the Korean Institute of Medical Education and Evaluation. This provided an opportunity for learning and interaction between a national and regional quality assurance body, and was requested by the College to gain multiple perspectives on the status of its educational program.

AMEWPR can also provide consultative visits to advise emerging medical schools on educational program development. Such an assessment was provided in September 2015 for the newly established Faculty of Medicine of the National University of Samoa, with the assistance of the Western Pacific Regional Office of the WHO. In other cases, AMEWPR participation is invited in the accreditation processes conducted by emerging or established national authorities such as those in China (the Working Committee for the Accreditation of Medical Education in China) and, more recently, in Japan (the Japan Accreditation Council for Medical Education).

Special project work is another increasing area of AMEWPR activity in recent years. The Association has been increasingly involved in planning by the authorities in Vietnam to reform the national system of medical education in that country, as part of a broader strategy to improve the quality of medical services available to the population. Most recently this contribution involved participation by the current President and the immediate Past President of AMEWPR in a high level roundtable meeting and technical workshop on Medical Education Reform in Vietnam (January 2016).

Another piece of work, commissioned by the Western Pacific Regional Office of WHO in 2015, involved compiling a report on Education in Medical Ethics and Professionalism in medical schools in the region. This was based on an original survey conducted through members of the Association, coordinated via the AMEWPR office at the Australian Medical Council. A contribution was also made in 2015 to the program of webinars (online seminars) conducted by WPRO in the broad area of Health Workforce Regulation, specifically addressing “The link between accreditation and regulation: the Australian and New Zealand experience”.

The Association seeks to build a wide network of contacts through its policy of holding its own annual Advisory Board meetings in conjunction with conferences held by medical education societies across the region. Most recently, this has involved meeting in association with the joint conference of the Australian & New Zealand Association of Health Professional Educators and the Asian Medical Education Association in Newcastle, Australia, in March-April 2015, and with the Asian Pacific Medical Education Conference in Singapore, January 2016. In both cases, AMEWPR made significant contributions to the program of the host conferences, highlight-

ing its work in quality assurance of medical education in the region.

Plans for the future

It seems clear that AMEWPR has established its value as a respected source of advice and services to medical schools and national authorities in the Western Pacific Region which are seeking to define and improve the quality of their medical education systems. It is expected that further requests for assistance in this regard will continue to be received over the coming years.

In addition to that dimension of our activity, I am keen to develop our involvement in a number of related areas. One of these is the relationship between medical school accreditation and regulation of medical practitioners, since both are ultimately dedicated to improving medical services to the public while protecting the public from poor or inappropriate practice. To this end, I am pleased to have been invited to join the program committee for the 12th International Conference on Medical Regulation being conducted by the International Association of Medical Regulatory Authorities in Melbourne, Australia, in September 2016 (<http://iamra2016.org>). One of the themes of the conference will be Medical Education, and plenary sessions as well as submitted presentations will address the issue of ensuring standards of education through the accreditation of medical schools. The opportunity will also be taken for AMEWPR to host the annual meeting of the WFME Executive Council in Melbourne immediately before the opening of the IAMRA Conference.

Another area we are seeking to develop further is our relationship with medical students in the region through engagement with the International Federation of Medical Student Associations. Their Regional Director for Asia-Pacific is an invited member of the AMEWPR Advisory Board, and proposals are under consideration for development of some high-level principles to guide the organisation of medical student placements and exchanges between medical schools in countries of the Western Pacific and beyond.

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Conflicts of interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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